

Planet in Rebellion

8. Footsteps in the Sky

FOOTSTEPS in the sky! Footsteps echoing across the corridors of space-the footsteps of a Friend!

They are footsteps that were, heard more than a century ago, as whispers in the distance. Footsteps with heavier tread as the whispers grew louder and more persistent. But today they are footsteps that approach with thunder tones.

For a moment watch with me a moving drama from the early days of World War II. It happened in the Philippines. General Douglas MacArthur had decided that in order to successfully wrest these great islands from the hand of a then ruthless enemy, he must delay direct action. Under cover of darkness, and surrounded with but a few close aides, he left with the promise, I Will return.

Not only an island, but the entire free world's prestige and honor were at stake. Millions hung on those words, "I will return."

Reminiscent, isn't it, of another drama of deliverance even more vitally affecting you and me. Jesus, the Son of God, nineteen hundred years ago was preparing to leave this planet. He had laid careful plans to wrest this world-only a tiny island in the universe-from the hands of the enemy. But He must delay direct action. Quietly, and surrounded by a few friends, He had made that familiar promise, I will return." "I will come again!"

For centuries the Christian church has taught that Jesus would return to this world a second time, and that His coming would bring an end to our world as we know it-to usher in a better one. Sober thinking these days takes into account such a possibility. Could it be that the hope of ages will soon be fulfilled?

Said Jesus, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." John 14:1-3.

Take that promise into your life, just as it reads. Believe it in simple, childlike faith. And it will give you a confidence that nothing can shake.

But you ask, "If our Lord is actually coming back, then why have we heard so little about it? For

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if He is, nothing else matters!”

And you are right. But the disturbing fact is that it is in our own Bibles-and has been there all the time. And these words of the Savior are not alone in Scripture. Not a dozen, not fifty, not a hundred, but 260 predictions about the second coming of Christ appear in the New Testament alone! The evidence is simply overwhelming.

Yes, the fact that He is coming, how He will come, the signs preceding His coming, and more important still, the necessary preparation for His coming, are all written down for us by Inspiration. No wonder we need to study our Bibles for ourselves!

Almost back to Eden the prophets described His coming. “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.” Jude 1:14.

Listen to Job: “For I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” Job 19:25. And to David: “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence.” Psalm 50:3.

Jesus Himself said, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:30.

And then the Revelation gives crowning glory to the Scripture teaching, as in almost the last words of the last chapter its writer spotlights the promise of the Savior, “Surely I come quickly.”

Not far from Tokyo, Fujiyama-or Fuji, as it is affectionately called-rears its snowcapped head more than twelve thousand feet above the horizon, dominating the landscape for many miles around. A Japanese artist does not consider his painting complete unless somewhere he has painted his beloved Fuji. He may have it in the distant background. He may paint it prominently in the foreground in gorgeous color. He may clothe it in the shadows of twilight or in the gray hues of the storm, but always Fuji.

Just so with the Bible and the return of Jesus to this earth. Sometimes the prophets paint the second coming in the somber tones of the great day of the Lord, but more often in the bright colors of hope and gladness to come. But whether in the shadows or in the light, always the second coming of Jesus Christ.

“I will return,” said MacArthur. “I will return,” said Jesus nineteen hundred years before him. And then, that day on Olivet, watch the moving scene: “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1: 10, 11.

This same Jesus with whom they had lived side by side, this same Jesus who had endeared Himself to them by unforgettable acts of ministry, was to return. His every act, His every word, had brought these men to love Him as a Person. And now this same Jesus would come again-as a Person. Nothing less could calm their fears. Nothing less could give them hope.

Men will actually see Him come. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.” Revelation 1:7. Eyes of love, eyes of hate, eyes of scoffing, eyes of anticipation, eyes of weeping, eyes of gladness-every eye will see Him come. “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Matthew 24:27.

Like a blaze of glory stretched from sky to sky, our Savior will return to earth past constellations of unnumbered worlds. He will come not as a Babe in Bethlehem, not as One despised and rejected of men, not condemned to die on a cross, but as King of kings and Lord of lords, whose right it is to reign.

He comes again, Creator of the speeding spheres. The God of nature returns. Little wonder that the very elements will first herald and then accompany His triumphant descent!

You remember that at the time of Christ’s death the sun refused to shine on the scene. The earth quaked. All nature rebelled at what was done to its Creator. Would you not, then, expect that the God of the atom, the Christ who stilled the storm and quieted the waves with a word, would herald His return, the climax of human history, by manifestations in nature? Listen to this: “I will show wonders in the heavens . . . before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.” Joel 2:30, 31. And Jesus Himself said, “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.” Luke 21:25.

How appropriate! No generation in history is better able to comprehend these two scriptures than ours, for no generation has so turned its attention upon the heavens.

The science of astronomy has fascinated men for centuries. When our teen-age children were but babies, men were still content to look through the eyepieces of our giant telescopes and wonder at what they saw. But today we are no longer content to look. Scientists are attempting to conquer the laws of

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gravitation so that we may personally explore outer space. It is to this generation-this space-minded generation-that God says, "I will show wonders in the heavens." Wonders in the heavens! Footsteps in the sky!

It was near the close of the eighteenth century. A new nation was arising, bound for a surprising destiny. These were the days of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin.

May 19, 1780, dawned like any other day in New England. Then the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled. By midmorning the clouds had become thinner, and the heavens assumed a brassy appearance. A few minutes later a heavy blanket of unearthly darkness covered the land. Men returned from labor. Schools were dismissed. Cows came home from pasture. Thoroughly alarmed, leaders and people alike sought an explanation. This was not an eclipse!

The strange darkness of the night that followed was no less terrifying than that of the day. It is said that a piece of white paper held before the eyes could not be seen, so intense was the gloom. After midnight the unnatural darkness disappeared, but the moon, though now visible, was veiled in a strange hue.

Footsteps in the sky! Then fifty-three years later another footstep was heard. Days and nights had been coming and going for centuries. The sun and the moon and the earth had been following their appointed course. Only occasionally had shooting stars been seen.

Then suddenly one night the stars took on a special meaning to mankind. A display of celestial fireworks took place in the heavens, with a magnificence never before seen, and extending over all North America. Said an eyewitness, "Never did rain fall much thicker than the meteors fell toward the earth." Here is a footstep of the coming King that borders on our generation. For who of you has not heard of some grandfather or great-grandfather who witnessed the falling of the stars on November 13, 1833?

In these celestial displays, this celestial skywriting, we find the opening of the time of the end and the ushering in of rapidly fulfilling prophecies of Christ's second coming. How can I make a statement like this? Listen to Revelation 6:12, 13: "And I beheld and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth."

And do you remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:29, 30? "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven: ... and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven."

Yes, wonders in the heavens-as a magnificent prelude to His return, a convincing demonstration that it is near. Footsteps in the sky! Some reverent astronomers have concluded that when our Lord returns, the vast corridor of Orion might be the star-lined procession way through which He will pass. Could this be true?

The Great Nebula in Orion, to the naked eye, appears as only a single hazy star. But the one-hundred-inch and the two-hundred-inch telescopes reveal this mystery of the heavens to be a tremendous corridor approximately nineteen trillion miles across. Said the astronomer Larkin, "These negatives reveal the opening and interior of a cavern so stupendous that our entire solar system ... would be lost therein."

And Garrett P. Serviss adds, "Is there not some vast mystery concealed in that part of the heavens? To me at least it seems so; for I can never shake off the impression that the creative power which made the universe lavished its richest gifts upon the locality in and surrounding Orion."

And what could Lord Tennyson have meant when, referring to Orion, he said, I never gazed upon it but I dreamt of some vast charm concluded in that star to make fame nothing"?

One says "Some vast mystery." Another says, "Some vast charm ... to make fame nothing." What giant lodestone seems to be pulling minds to that part of the heavens? Could this canyon in the skies possibly be the corridor through which our Savior will return?

But whatever His pathway, whatever vaulted highway of the sky our returning Lord might choose, the Apostle Paul describes His descent in these positive, thrilling words: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

It is in your own Bible. And the prophecies indicate with thunder tones that this generation-that these eyes-will actually see the fulfillment of these words.

A dark picture ahead? Atomic night? No, a glorious dawn, when the Prince of heaven, the King of kings, your Savior and mine, will return according to His promise to bring deliverance. Said Daniel, "And

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at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” Daniel 12:1. Add to this the words of our Savior, “Then look up, for your redemption draws nigh.” Luke 21:28. At that time-look up! Deliverance will come-from the skies!

May I take you back to that glad day at the close of the second world conflict when two thousand prisoners of war were delivered from enemy hands. Two of the prisoners had built a little radio and secretly listened to the news. One day they heard a familiar voice. “This is General MacArthur speaking. I have returned!”

What marvelous news! The months had dragged wearily into two and a half long years since the day the general left behind him the promise to return. Now he was returning amid a thunder of guns, with an armada of ships and an air force the like of which had never before been seen in the Pacific.

In the meantime, the news filtered through the camp that the enemy, sensing the hopelessness of its own situation, and possibly in the spirit of reprisal, had actually decreed the death of the prisoners. Among the prisoners was one who had been asked to serve as a camp official. One evening the guard informed him that at seven o’clock the next morning he was to call the prisoners together. Could this be the time when they would hear the long-feared death sentence?

Terrible were those hours as he watched the hands of the clock moving toward that fateful moment. Then he went out with the bell ringer to call the camp. The steel bar was raised, ready to strike the gong. Would this be the camp’s death call?

But suddenly they both looked up. Each saw the same thing. In unison they exclaimed, “Look! Planes!” But were they friendly or enemy planes? The bell ringer, his hand still in the air, watched in breathless anticipation. Nearer and nearer they came. No, they were not enemy Planes. As they roared overhead, paratroopers leaped out into the prison yards. Deliverance had come at last!

Make no mistake about it. The forces of evil are intent on destroying the human race. The enemy of God and man has his hand raised, ready to strike the death gong. The great controversy between Christ and Satan, between good and evil, between right and wrong, is on the verge of its last titanic struggle. But it is written, “At that time thy people shall be delivered.” At that time – “look up for your redemption draws nigh.”

“Down the minister aisles of splendor, from betwixt the cherubim,
Through the wondering throng, with motion strong and fleet,
Sounds His victor tread approaching, with a music far and dim-
The music of the coming of His feet.

“Sandaled not with sheen of silver, girded not with woven gold,
Weighted not with shimmering gems and odors sweet,
But white-winged and shod with glory in the Tabor light of old-
The glory of the coming of His feet.

“He is coming, O my friend, with His everlasting peace,
With His blessedness immortal and complete;
He is coming, O my friend, and His coming brings release-
I listen for the coming of His feet.”

-Lyman W. Allen.

Footsteps in the sky! Deliverance at last! The Savior face to face! Eternal life with Him!
Just think of taking hold of a hand and finding it God’s hand! Just think of feeling invigorated and finding it immortality! Just think of waking up and finding it home!

9. The Hinge of Time

I WATCHED in England with the coronation crowds. All London was a spectacle of fantastic preparation, for royal splendor defies description. As early as twenty-four hours before the dawn of Coronation Day, eager thousands began their struggle for a vantage point along the streets where the